

Seeking to fight the high costs of fuel for many commuters, Rep. John Campbell unveiled a plan Wednesday that would return to workers some funds spent on commuting.

“What are we doing about [gas prices] in Washington? Nothing,” Campbell said during a news conference at the Chevron at MacArthur Boulevard and Bison Avenue in Newport Beach. “This bill would enable people to relieve some of that pain.”

Campbell’s bill, which will be presented in Washington sometime next week, would give a 30% return on money spent on an employee’s commute to work. If passed, the bill would add a new line-item deduction on federal tax returns in order for commuters to get the break.

“People are, frankly, having a hard time paying to get to work,” Campbell said. “Let people keep more of their money when they are hurting.”

Campbell said it would be up to the Internal Revenue Service to determine how the deductions would be compiled, such as a log book or receipts, but he added they do not intend to have a distinction between cars ranging in mileage. The congressman also doesn’t expect the tax break to affect gas prices even if it does shift demand.

Steve Young, the Democratic candidate challenging Campbell, questions the timing of Campbell’s bill and the necessity of his news conference.

A bill that could ask the government to give millions in tax breaks isn’t affordable while the country is facing a massive deficit, and it doesn’t address the oil crisis the country is facing, Young said.

“Anything that gives working families a break is great, but this is a Band-Aid for a heart attack,” Young said. “Press conferences are for when you come up with a solution to the problem.”

Campbell agrees with Young the bill isn’t a solution and added it will take a combination of various resources, such as offshore drilling, alternative fuels and conservation, to address the problems ahead.

“It is a Band-Aid,” Campbell said. “But people are bleeding, and we need a Band-Aid until we heal the wound.”

Campbell argued bills like the tax break aren’t what created the deficit, but spending was to blame. He added that he and others have been working to curb that spending.

Despite Young’s remarks, Campbell believes the bill will attract bipartisan support.

To illustrate how the bill would help, Campbell brought Kay Kearney to speak at the news conference.

Kearney, who runs Doctor’s Ambulance service based out of Laguna Hills, has been hit hard by gas prices. Her fleet of 25 ambulances services much of Orange County.

A tank of gas for an ambulance costs about \$200, and the ambulances can run through half a tank each day, Kearney said.

Her service has to respond to 911 calls by law, but the company has had to pick and choose where it services for other calls to help save on gas. Doctor's Ambulance has had to realign its business market, Kearney's employees are paying more for benefits, and her profit margin has been steadily decreasing.

"People are waiting a lot longer to get moved," she said.

BY THE NUMBERS

Estimating how much commuters would possibly get back under Campbell's plan:

Miles Driven A Day = 100 miles

Miles Per Gallon = 20

Price of Gas = \$4.57

Percent of money spent given back = 30%

Total money given back = \$1,713

Totals based on five days of work, 50 weeks out of the year.